

## CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING, PART OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS INFLUENCE UPON CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE

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### Abstract

Cause-related marketing as part of corporate social responsibility, becomes an increasingly used tool by companies operating in the market. Many studies have shown the benefits of cause related marketing campaigns, including attracting new customers, increasing sales of products or services, creating a favourable brand image and raising funds for a social cause. This article is structured in two parts. After analyzing the concept of cause-related marketing and main trends regarding research in this area, a case study on the influence of cause related marketing on consumer attitudes is presented, as reflected by the analysis of a questionnaire administered to youth.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility, cause-related marketing, consumer behaviour, marketing research

**JEL Classification:** M14, O16, D01, D03

### Introduction

In the past 20 years, debates regarding corporate social responsibility have evolved substantially, moving from the stage of conceptual defining and delimitation, to a stage of identification and analysis of the specific methods and techniques to implement CSR.

Research shows that companies are focusing attention on those stakeholders who can more influence their business. Thus, organizations are more concerned about shareholders than consumers and employees, and very little about society and the environment, although CSR involves equal emphasis on all. There is a big difference between the expression of a concern and implementation of an action to solve this problem (Crowther 2004). The evaluation of CSR activities is rather difficult since there is a lot of incertitude regarding its efficiency.

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This work was supported by CNCSIS –UEFISCSU, project number PNII – IDEI code 1888/2008 and by project 91-067/2007 financed by CNMP.

This article is a result of the project POSDRU/88/1.5./S/55287 „Doctoral Programme in Economics at European Knowledge Standards (DOESEC)". This project is co-funded by the European Social Fund through The Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, coordinated by The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies in partnership with West University of Timisoara.

While some see social responsibility initiatives as an expression of corporate strategy, corporate identity, market power or dependency of some stakeholders, the challenge for management becomes more serious in terms of understanding the real needs of stakeholders and the way in which CSR programs may affect different audiences. Organizations have at their disposal a number of initiatives, which are linked to a number of implementation mechanisms. Initiatives may be functional (specific human resources, marketing activity, the supply chain) and corporate (development, environmental protection, corporate governance). Cause-related marketing (Cause Related Marketing - CRM), as a part of companies' CSR, is a type of program in which a company commits to donate an amount that depends on the sales they achieved in certain period time for a cause (Kotler and Lee, 2006). Typically, a CRM campaign involves an offer that is valid for a period of time, refers to a specific product of the company and performs for the benefit of non-governmental organizations, or another partner, who has legitimacy in the selected cause and the ability to manage money. (Figure no. 1)

This study consists of two parts. After analyzing the concept of cause-related marketing and main trends regarding research in this area, case study upon the influence of cause related marketing on consumer attitudes is presented, as reflected by the administration of a questionnaire to students in the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies.

### 1. The concept of cause-related marketing



**Figure no. 1: Cause-related marketing, part of social responsibility**

In the UK, the Business in the Community (BITC) organization has been actively involved in working to improve standards in responsible business practice since its inception in 1982. Its member companies are committed to using best practice in order to make a more positive impact on society, and this takes the form of specific initiatives including cause-related marketing campaigns as well as considering the wider aspects of corporate social responsibility. Business in the Community (2004) defines cause-related marketing as: *"A commercial activity by which business and charities or causes form a partnership with each other to market an image, product or service for mutual benefit."*

As can be inferred from the above definition, cause-related marketing is a commercial agreement which is based on a win-win situation for both participants: the company and supported social causes, while the consumer benefit is secondary. However, consumer participation is vital to ensure a successful marketing campaign linked to a cause and should therefore be cultivated by highlighting the long-term benefits to consumers through the proper positioning and adequate targeting of audience.

The following points should be added to this core definition:

- CRM classically involves the corporate donation to a charity or cause being contingent on consumer purchase to some extent;
- The responsibility for CRM activity lies within a company's marketing function;
- The consumer is also a partner in the process and derives benefit of some kind from it, if only the satisfaction of making an indirect donation.

The purest form of CRM is the explicit link between the purchase of goods or services and the funnelling of revenue to a cause or specific charity. These arrangements typically involve a charity putting its 'brand' on the packaging of a product in return for an advertised share of the revenue created for the commercial partner through purchase.

In the United States, cause related marketing is a concept defined as “*working together in financial concert with a charity ... to tie a company and its products to a cause*” (Ptacek and Salazar, 1997). On the other hand, is also considered “*a way to build brand equity ... as it creates the most added value and most directly enhances financial performance*” (Mullen, 1997). Collins (1993) states that a cause-related marketing can generate the long-term value needed for a company to survive and achieve competitive advantage.

Cause related marketing is a concept that gets deeper connotation in the Europe, where marketing specialist have concluded that supporting a cause is an opportunity to enhance corporate reputation, raise brand awareness, increase customer loyalty and build sales (Kotler and Lee, 2005; Siltaoja, 2006). CRM is a communication tool that reinforces the brand equity (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002, Lewis, 2003). Also, cause-related marketing help marketing specialists to stay connected with consumers' mood and wishes, as it uses more sensitive, credible and relevant instruments to society (Kotler and Keller, 2006).

Among the benefits of a cause related marketing campaign there are (Kotler and Lee, 2005):

- *Attracting new customers* - the most innovative case is the one of American Express Company. By the fundraising campaign to restore the Statue of Liberty the company increased the use of credit cards, and attracted new customers;
- *Reaching niche segments*- nongovernmental organization are working with online marketing leaders in order to reach niche consumers, to enter a specific audience and generate interest towards an important campaign that could save lives;
- *Increasing sales of products or services*;
- *Creating a positive image of a brand* – by associating with supporting the cause, the company will reach a larger visibility which will consolidate brand equity;
- *Raise funds for a social cause* – example is the Avon brand, which positioned itself by recruiting, training and motivating sales force, and created a strong CRM campaign to fight against breast cancer.

Customers are not satisfied just to receive a product or a service; they expect a value that goes beyond quality, in the area of social responsibility. Customers are moving towards those companies that prove citizenship and assume responsibility. Market research highlighted that most consumers will prefer to buy from those companies that are engaged in supporting a cause, while there are no differences in price and quality of products or services (Cone 2007).

## 2. Trends in cause-related marketing research

According to a recent report published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2008), protecting the company's reputation is a challenge for today managers, amid large companies' failures and growing pressure coming from increasingly demanding consumers.

Ethical management, its main approaches, corporate governance, stakeholder orientation and corporate social responsibility, were born in the U.S. market. Frederick W. (1998) distinguishes two principles that formed the basis of these practices. First, the *principle of philanthropy*, according to which companies should provide volunteering support for the disadvantaged or helpless. Secondly, there is *the principle of tutoring*, which requires corporations to play not only the economic role, but also the role of custodians for public interest, acting in support of communities affected by their activities.

In its modern version, the principle of charity takes the shape of corporate philanthropy and voluntary action by community interest. These have been imposed on the U.S. market since 1920, with the opening program of public funding charity Community Chest, forerunner of the United Fund. On the other hand, the principle of guardianship evolves to corporate practices attentive to the relationship between business and society, and seeking to balance the interests of shareholders and management with the community. Both principles are the basis for corporate social responsibility, where we include cause-related marketing.

Thanks to joint ownership, state-private, dominant for a long time in Europe, motivations and trends in ethics management strategies are different from those of the U.S. market. If in the U.S. we can find a positive approach, with strategies and practices self-imposed by companies, in Europe a negative approach is defined, based on rules and principles imposed by the state and society. While the U.S. market motivates and encourages ethical behaviour, the European environment imposes ethical rules and regulates. If in the United States ethics is a product of competition, cause-related marketing being seen as an added value and as a distinctive element in competing brands on the market, in Europe, ethics does not seem to be a need of the market, but a requirement imposed from the outside. While volunteering and originality are encouraged in social programs in the United States, on the European market the regulatory trends lead to a standardization of ethical performance criteria and standardized cause-related marketing campaigns. Yet, regarding the business ethics, the Romanian market follows the European trend.

International Business Report (Grant Thornton, 2008) questions more than 34 economies around the world and reveals that small and medium firms, known as the "engine of world economy" will have to review their attitude towards the concept of social responsibility and cause-related marketing very quickly. In general, until now the ethical practices of multinational companies were in the public sight. From these, it was expected the most in terms of financial resources, time management and involvement in sustainable development actions. According to the report, multinationals were traditionally focusing their attention to

the following areas: human rights, working conditions, environment and fight against corruption.

The study revealed that the motivating factors behind CSR practices are: keeping most valuable employees, controlling costs to enhance efficiency and protect environmental resources, the need to build trust and loyalty, strengthening brands, saving the planet, better relations with investors and government pressures. The same study indicated that CSR programs preferred by most companies are those related to cause-related marketing, because the association with a disadvantaged cause has a positive impact on strengthening the brand and reputation building.

Despite the enthusiasm it enjoys, the concept of CRM is still vulnerable to those who deny its strategic role and advocating, in recession times, reducing costs of social investment. To cope with criticism, the concept of cause-related marketing should be explored and promoted in terms of tangible economic benefits that it brings. This involves passing the most difficult test, that of value added and profits. The need to test cause-related marketing programs in terms of profit stressed the need to measure their impact based on quantitative and qualitative indicators. Social and environmental reports appear to be the most effective methods of measuring cause-related marketing activities (Boston College Centre for Corporate Citizenship, 2010).

Academic research on cause-related marketing mainly focused on two areas: CRM in terms of companies and CRM effects on consumer behaviour and other relevant categories of stakeholders. Experts say that there is a big influence of cause-related marketing on consumers, but also on some other categories of stakeholders. Drumwright's research (1996) shows that the CRM activity has a strong impact on the people inside the companies, such as employees, management. In this qualitative research among employees, the conclusion is that a cause-related campaign has the role to enhance economic performance and effectively communicate the company's mission to stakeholder groups. Thus the company's goals are economic, non-economic, or mixed.

The success of a CRM campaign is given by the compatibility between the company and the cause sustained. Compatibility is desirable but not absolutely necessary (Bloom, Hussein and Szykman, 1995). It's shown that those programs where there is high compatibility between the companies and their cause and are most effective.

Larson et al (2008) shows that there is a link between cause-related marketing and sales forces performance. The research does not attempt to explore the reasons why companies prefer to implement CRM, but focuses on how such campaigns targeted to a specific group of stakeholders (example consumers) influence the reactions of other stakeholder groups (example sales forces).

Another line of research shows how consumers react to a company's social initiatives and cause-related marketing effects on consumer behaviour (Barone, Miyazaki and Taylor, 2000, Ellen More and Webb, 2000, Roy and Graeff, 2003).

CONE report (2007) studied consumer expectations from U.S. companies and how their perceptions can influence purchase intentions, willingness to hire and investment decisions related to companies. If initially consumers were primarily studied, research has been extended to employees, investors and other key stakeholder groups. Most Americans said when choosing companies they are influenced if there is any relevance and consistency

between the sustained cause and the activity of a company. Environmental protection and sustainable development are among the causes most appreciated by the Americans. There is a sophistication of customer desires regarding cause-related marketing campaigns, so companies are forced to reply with sustainable, authentic, transparent and effectively communicated initiatives, in order to show the values that underpin their functionality (Cone 2007).

### 3. Case study, research methodology and hypothesis

In this article we developed a selective survey, based on examining only a portion of the total population, selected in a way that reflects the structure of the whole. Selective survey - compared with exhaustive research - raises a number of benefits such as: reducing the number of studied cases, short period of time to conduct the study, low cost implementation, and the possibility of a more rigorous control regarding collection and processing of information, lower human resources involved in research.

In achieving objectives through this selective research, we employed the questionnaire survey - as a means of gathering information - with questions in a predetermined order, most questions being closed or fixed-choice response. The questionnaire was administered directly to students aged over 19 years from ASE, Bucharest. A total number of 100 questionnaires were completed of which 62% were answered by female. (Table no. 1)

The purpose of this research is to highlight the influences that cause-related marketing has upon consumers' attitudes.

Researchers affirm that attitudes are *"learned predispositions to respond consistently to an object or a class of objects in a favourable or unfavourable way"* (Cătoi and Teodorescu 2004). This suggests that attitudes are mental positions that cannot be observed directly, but must be analyzed based on research results. The fact that attitudes are learned affirms they will be affected by information and experience.

People acquire attitudes through action and learning and affect their purchasing behaviour. People have attitudes toward religion, politics, clothes, music, food, sports, and practically toward any other area that they interact with directly or indirectly. Attitudes put people into a frame of mind: liking or disliking an object, moving toward or away from it. Attitudes lead people to behave in a fairly consistent way toward similar objects. Because attitudes economize on energy and thought, they can be very difficult to change (Kotler and Keller 2006).

**Table no. 1: Structure of the sample**

SEX	Percentage	Income	Percentage
Women	62%	Under 500 RON	21%
Man	38%	501-800	28%
		801-1200	22%
		1201-2000	18%
		Above 2000	11%

#### 4. Research results

The questionnaire includes fictional situations that are designed to familiarize respondents with the concept of cause-related marketing. We used for this the 5 point Likert scale (5 strongly agree - 1 strongly disagree) to measure constructs and to identify the degree of involvement of respondents in the campaign presented below and to what extent it influenced their purchase intention.

*Campaign: Imagine that when eating at McDonalds, you see an advertising banner saying that this chain of fast-foods will donate 1 RON for each soft drink sold over one year to a national children's charity. The total amount donated varies according to the number of items sold; the more sold, the more the charity will receive.*

Regarding the extent to which respondents agree that it would be worth buying from McDonalds because of this donation, 37% consumers agreed with this statement, while 23% expressed total agreement (Table no. 2). Initiate a campaign of this kind draws attention to the company and in consumers' mind it creates the perception that buying the products is justified in order to help the children charity.

Considering the degree in which respondents agree or not with the idea that they would buy the product anyway, independently from the campaign, 35% expressed disagreement and 18% total disagreement (Table no. 2). Consumers prefer these products because they feel they can support the cause-related marketing campaign.

As the analysis highlights, regarding the situation in which the consumers would buy from the fast-food both for the quality of the products and the supported cause, 37% of respondents agreed and 29% expressed total agreement (Table no. 2). Consumers show a growing interest for products compliant with quality requirements, but an important aspect is the corporate citizenship of the fast-food in the society. Corporate social responsibility campaign enjoys greater visibility, within the global tendency of standardization, where every company operates within a competitive market place, characterized by many products of similar quality and price. In the long run, this context affects company's ability to carry out its strategy, and therefore CSR can lead to competitive advantage.

As research showed, 61% of respondents believe that the campaign aims to increase sales, 11% expressed total agreement (Table no. 2). In this context, it is evident that consumers truly believe the main objective for the company is to maximize the profit, rather than genuinely support the charity, and ultimately the society. An explanation would be the distrust, scepticism associated with these campaigns. Therefore, it is highly recommended to focus on building confidence, by presenting the both positive aspects, the advantages and also the disadvantages, in order to cultivate transparency and sincere communication with audiences, actual and potential consumers.

Results outlined that 50 people agree and 4 people have consented with the assertion that this fast-food has social value (Table no. 2). To have social value, a brand must first gain recognition. The true value of a brand is its capacity to capture preferences and customers loyalty. The above fictional situation reveals an effect of positive differentiation that linkage with a cause has it upon consumers' attitudes.

Table no. 2: Cause-related marketing and perceived image

Questions	5 Strongly agree	4 Agree	3 Neutral	2 Disagree	1 Strongly disagree
Because of this donation, it's worth buying from this company	23%	37%	18%	18%	4%
I would buy the product anyway; I'm not interested in the campaign.	7%	11%	29%	35%	18%
I would buy the product, both for its quality and the supported cause.	29%	37%	20%	11%	3%
I feel the company is making this donation to increase sales.	11%	61%	16%	8%	4%
I believe McDonalds brand has social value.	4%	50%	25%	18%	3%
The company id making this donation to improve corporate image.	37%	54%	2%	4%	3%

The vast majority of respondents consider that this donation is intended to improve company image. In cause-related marketing campaigns, scepticism arose as consumers' perception is that the companies have other interests, beyond the philanthropic intent. They may also believe that the amount of money collected is not so substantially as to have a real impact and to make a difference or the cause. Many strongly believe that the sole purpose of a company is to maximize profits and improve corporate image.

*Campaign: Imagine that when shopping in a hypermarket for a soft drink, you see an advertising banner saying that this chain of hypermarkets is asking customers to vote during one year for a charitable donation of their choice by depositing their cash receipt in one of three boxes (UNICEF, an international children's charity, the RED CROSS or help for EARTHQUAKE victims). The donation given to the selected charity is 1% of the amount of the receipts put in the box.*

The majority would buy more (Table no. 3) because of this campaign, as they perceive a difference by linkage with three supporting cause. Consumers are attracted by the creative, innovative idea of the company to communicate to them and directly involve them in the process of sustaining the charities.

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Table no. 3: Cause related marketing and consumers' degree of involvement

Questions	5 Strongly agree	4 Agree	3 Neutral	2 Disagree	1 Strongly disagree
Because of this donation, I would buy more from this hypermarket.	9%	38%	25%	21%	7%
The campaign doesn't interest me; it would not influence my purchase decision.	8%	10%	28%	42%	12%
I feel like this company involves me in choosing the cause.	12%	55%	22%	9%	2%
I consider myself a responsible person, therefore I would buy more to support the cause.	12%	41%	26%	20%	1%
I believe other companies should regularly be involved in similar campaigns.	33%	54%	9%	3%	1%

The majority of respondents would buy more (Table no. 3) because of this campaign, as they perceive a difference by linkage with three supporting cause. Consumers are attracted by the creative, innovative idea of the company to communicate to them and directly involve them in the process of sustaining the charities.

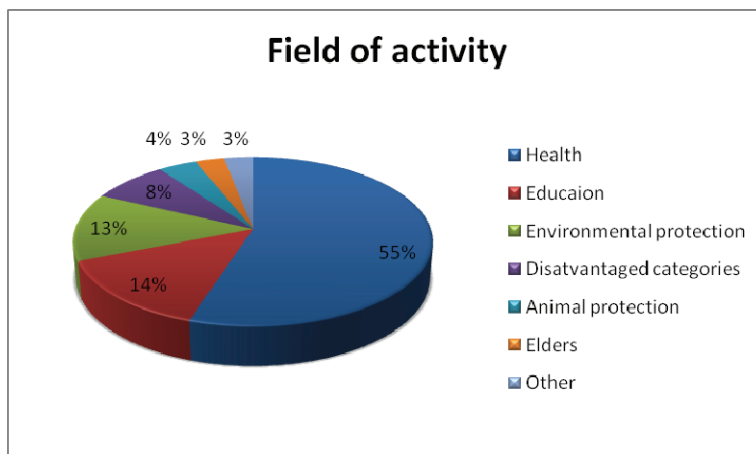
Regarding the statement that the campaign doesn't interest them, therefore it would not influence their purchase decision 42 respondents disagree, 12 strongly disagree and 28 are indifferent (Table no. 3). They wouldn't normally buy the products, but not that there is a relation with the cause, they feel the need to buy. Therefore cause-related marketing campaign, as a part of corporate social responsibility, may induce an impulse in consumers' behaviour, as they are attracted to the cause and they will buy products only because of the linkage with the cause, which in this case constitutes a great competitive advantage for the hypermarket.

When referring to the statement that respondents feel or don't feel that they are involved in choosing the right cause, 55 respondents agreed and 12 strongly agreed (Table no. 3). By the opportunity of selecting between the 3 charities, which will be the one to receive the donation, they feel truly engaged in the campaign.

Regarding the statement "I consider myself a responsible person, therefore I would buy more to support the cause", 41 people agreed and 12 people strongly agreed (Table no. 3). This campaign offers more value for the customers, which justifies the higher purchased quantity.

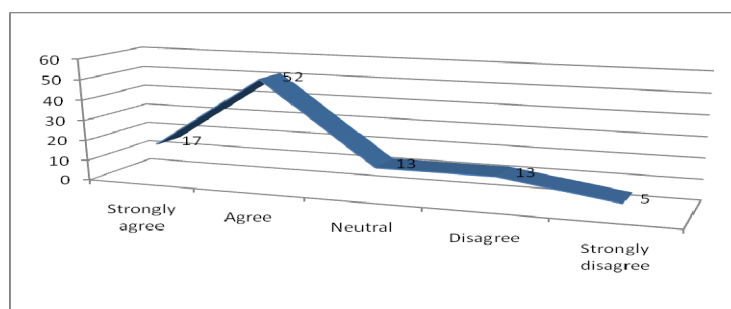
Given the affirmation "I believe other companies should regularly be involved in similar campaigns", 54 people agreed and 33 expressed total agreement (Table no. 3). Most of them said that cause-related marketing campaigns should be conducted regularly, therefore we discovered that consumers honestly believe this is a necessity that corporations should be focused upon.

Respondents consider that the field that mostly needs support is health. (Figure no. 2)



**Figure no. 2: Main area that requires supporting**

More than half of respondents (52 people) agreed and 17 expressed total agreement (Figure no. 3) when asked if they would be willing to pay an extra amount of money for the products or services associated with a social cause. This highlights a positive attitude from consumers, who want to pay more for socially responsible products. This can be explained by the fact that consumers believe they can make a difference; they can help disadvantaged categories when acquiring products linked to a cause. For people with a high sense of responsibility, the extra payment is legitimate when serving to a noble purpose. A moral individual would surely have a positive impact on society. Moreover the degree to which consumers would pay an extra amount of money represents a measurement for brand equity.



**Figure no. 3: The extent to which consumers are willing to pay an extra price for a product or service related to a social cause**

#### *The influence of sex on socially responsible products*

To study the correlation between gender and respondents class structure, and to outline their attitudes towards socially responsible products, we've combined the groups.

Therefore, when calculating  $\chi^2$  test, we discovered there is a significant relation between the two variables. The value for coefficient of contingency is 0.301, and indicates a significant correlation; coefficient of contingency is 0,328 which represent a positive direct

relation that has an average intensity. Women are more likely to buy socially responsible products, in comparison with men. On the other hand, women are more preoccupied by aspects connected to social responsibility, and sometimes their purchase behaviour is influenced by the company that develop social campaigns.

One can say that people prefer female to buy socially responsible than men. On the other hand, women are those concerned with issues associated with those products and their purchasing habits are influenced by companies engaged in socially responsible. This bears out the hypothesis that women are inclined to purchase socially responsible products. We can therefore confirm the hypothesis which states that women are lean to buy products or services related to a cause.

*The main sources of information* (Tabel no. 4) are Internet (69%), radio/TV (59%), newspapers (54%), and friends (48 %). Regarding consumers' attitudes towards corporate social responsibility principal direction of action aimed at protecting the environment (Table no. 5)

**Table no. 4: Consumers preference towards sources of information**

	Responses		Cases percentage
	N	Percentage	
Internet	69	23.8%	69.0%
Newspapers/Magazines	54	18.6%	54.0%
Radio/TV	59	20.3%	59.0%
Brochures/Flyers	35	12.1%	35.0%
Friends	48	16.6%	48.0%
Colleagues	11	3.8%	11.0%
None	5	1.7%	5.0%
Other sources	9	3.1%	9.0%
Total	290	100.0%	290.0%

**Table no. 5: Consumers' attitudes towards corporate social responsibility**

Consumers attitude	Yes	No
Search information regarding socially responsible companies, as part of acquisition process.	23%	77%
Buy brand related to a cause.	54%	46%
Recycle.	66%	34%
Participate to volunteering programs.	29%	71%
Donate blood.	23%	77%
Show interest in environment protection.	80%	20%

## Conclusions

Corporate Social Responsibility is important for acquiring long-term success, being each organization's essential competitive advantage and a path to society's sustainable development. The new consumers identify with increased requirements and will prefer to buy from companies that are committed to noble social causes, as long as there are no major differences concerning the quality of the products.

The study in this paper, made over the impact of cause related marketing, highlighted the following issues:

- 52% of the questioned people said that they are willing to pay extra for a product or a service associated with a social cause
- 91% agree that cause related marketing creates a positive image of the company
- 87% think that organizations should regularly involve in cause related marketing programs
- Should they have to choose between two products/services with the same quality and price, 74% would rather pick the product/service associated with a social cause.
- Women are influenced in their buying decision by cause related products.

In this context, the importance of social responsibility becomes obvious. Reputation is the most competitive advantage a company has. Those organisations that enjoy a positive image will obtain higher prices for their products and will have the ability to change consumer buying behaviour.

Finally, we will highlight that technological development has allowed transmitting the information flows instantly and at low cost. The Internet has a high importance in transmitting information to a global audience and can help increasing consumers' confidence in socially responsible businesses. We remind that in the famous Fortune magazine, 80% of the 500 presented companies offer online information about social responsibility programs and their involvement in social problems. Consumers trust those companies that communicate openly, continuously and sincerely. It's a moral issue that every organisation has to assume.

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